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ABSTRACT

Costa Rican education, although fairly successful compared to other Third World or Latin American countries, has serious problems needing action, including (1) large discrepancies between educational ideals and the realities of urban privilege, with regard to access and quality, and (2) a rote, narrow, superficial, impractical education. Other problems include a lack of textbooks, support services, and well-trained teachers; inadequate coordination within education and between education and national needs and realities; the heavy politicization of education; the need for decentralization of educational management; a lack of educational research; heavy United States influence; and declining cost-effectiveness. This overview includes sections on the history of educational development, educational planning, school system structure and organization, educational access and quality, private education, national financing and costs of education, student costs, curriculum, special education, teacher training, United States influence, and problems. (DCS)

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Education in Costa Rica: An Overview

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Lewis and Clark College

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EDUCATION IN COSTA RICA: AN OVERVIEW

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November, 1983

History of Educational Development: Formal education in Costa Rica was established after the country's independence from Spain in 1821. Even then, limited primary education was available to a small minority of boys in the country. The rich received education in Europe, especially in France and Belgium. Since most of the intellectual elite was educated in France, the French educational system became the model by 1870. The University of Saint Thomas was established in 1870, which lasted until 1890, but was then dissolved. A French type normal school was founded which embodied and disseminated the intellectual and ideological objectives of the French revolution. In other words, formal education was from its inception liberal, humanistic and European oriented. It was also elitist and limited in access.

By 1900, many Costa Rican intellectuals and government officials belonged to secret Masonic fraternities. These people were anti-clerical and pro science and liberal education. This group invited well-known Swiss scholars and scientists such as Pittier to assist Costa Rica with its educational system. Pittier was instrumental in initiating major programs and schools such as the Liceo Costa Rica, St. Luis Gonzaga and Escole the Normale in Heridia. It was Pittier's followers who later founded the University of Costa Rica and continued his educational tradition. Many Europeans were brought in to teach in Costa Rican high schools and the university, hence the liberal orientation of the entire educational system.[1] Currently the national educational system is guided by the Organic Law of Education passed in 1957, which is administered by the Minister of Education, who is a political appointee and is advised by a seven-person Superior Council of Education.

Educational Planning: Modern national and international developments have forced the country to reassess its educational goals and priorities and to engage in some educational planning. Thus Costa Rica attempted a national educational development plan between 1972 and 1980. This plan can be outlined as follows:

A. Raise the average of the educational level of the population, especially in the heretofore less favored zones; in order to gain national integration, improve the lives of citizens, and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.

1. Offer a growing number of youth a mandatory general education of nine years divided into 3 year cycles.

2. Establish an educational structure that is well articulated and correlated, and which avoids drastic divisions between levels.

3. Expand pre-school education, especially in the rural areas.

4. Transform the system for student evaluation and promotion into one that will assist students to gain the highest level possible.

5. Establish a permanent system of in-service training that will enable the personnel to train to comply with the demands of this Plan, and also, constantly keep abreast of the new developments in education.

B. Modernize the educational system so that it can meet the socio-economic needs of the country and favor its process for development.

1. Initiate a process for the perpetual up-dating of content material and methods to stimulate educators.

2. Provide all educational centers with adequate materials and service so that they can develop learning programs that will stimulate students.

3. Reform the third cycle in a modern sense to serve as an introduction to a world of technology, and as a beginning of learning in the world of work.

4. Diversify and expand professional training offerings, especially in the diversified cycle and in the parallel systems, to contribute to the development of human resources.

5. Improve, expand and maintain special education services to help the development of the capabilities of the students who have some deficiency, so that they can be incorporated into society.

6. Strengthen the General Directorate for Educational Planning, making it an entity that is capable of understanding the educational demands and needs of society, and is current on the development process. This entity will keep in regular contact with the National Planning Office, the National Commission on Human Resources, and those Ministries that deal with the economy of the country.

C. Maintain the current percentage of the national budget that is allocated to the educational budget without impairing the improvement of education in quality and quantity.

1. Establish an efficient system to gain more from the services of teachers.

2. Establish an adequate criteria to provide non-teaching personnel.

3. Establish technical norms for the construction of school buildings and the procurement of equipment.

4. Determine a criteria for the size of schools based on local needs; consolidate small and uneconomical schools; and avoid the uncontrolled growth of other schools.[2]

This plan also included what is referred to as "nuclearization." This entails dividing the country into clearly identifiable educational regions and districts in accordance with geographic, demographic, transport, economic, social, and communication and other criteria. The goal has been to promote decentralization, efficiency, access, and community involvement in education. Initial assessment by the Multinational Center for Education Research indicates that this "nuclearization" is beginning to have positive impact on education in the country.[3] The country is now divided into seven educational regions and some 409 districts.

The much heralded reform plan of the 1970's was implemented on a very limited basis. Poor implementation has been due to lack of funds, lack of professional cadre, lack of support and coordination within the Ministry of Education (MOE), lack of cooperation from other government agencies, centralization, politics, inertia and poor insight into the needs, realities, and aspirations of the rural population. Another problem was lack of a clear and coherent indigenous model of education and the vain attempt to superimpose the American educational system on Costa Rica. Others viewed the reform as communistic. Further, since it was superimposed from the top down and without adequate communication, teachers and lower level administrators refused to cooperate in its application. Thus the MOE attempted a transitional Four Year Plan (1979-82) dealing with the areas of educational philosophy, quality, legal structure, education and socioeconomic development, and other specific program development.

Intense ideological debate and struggle between conservatives and progressives are under way. The struggle in education is simply a reflection of such struggle in national life at large. Progressives criticize education for being irrelevant to Costa Rican realities and to current and future demands of the time. They argue that children are limited by the school, the teachers, and the curriculum. They demand an education which will equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and ideologies. They want schools to teach students initiative, creativity, autonomy, cooperation and the ability to criticize, conceptualize, analyze, synthesize and apply. They want quality and equity in education. The conservatives see no reason for change.[4]

Structure and Organization; Pre-schools: About 20,000 children are enrolled in some 400 public elementary schools that provide pre-school education, while another 2,500 children go to 35 private pre-schools. In addition to these, there are some 240 Education and Nutrition Centers serving about 7,000 children 3 to 6 years of age. Another 1,500 children between the ages of 2 and 6 are served by 30 Integrated Child Care Centers. These centers provide child care for working mothers.

General Basic Education: Nine years of formal education is free and obligatory, but not universal. These nine years are divided into three 3-year cycles. Promotion from one grade to the other is automatic during the first cycle, but children are tested at the end of each three-year cycle and must meet national standards if they are to be promoted to the next phase. In 1982, there were 40 private and 2,941 public primary (grades 1-6) and 26 private and 216 public secondary (grades 7-12) schools in the country, serving a total of 520,677 students.[5] Most primary schools are sex segregated. The average student-teacher ratio for the country is 31:1 with a range of 15 to 40.

Secondary Education: This phase of schooling, too, is divided into two 3-year cycles, namely cycle 3 (grades 7-9) and cycle 4 (grades 10-12). The third cycle, although mandatory, is invariably part and parcel of secondary schools. This cycle is not well-integrated with the primary (cycles 1 and 2) education. The fourth cycle (grades 10-12) offers the following program options of concentrated studies. First, a two-year academic university preparatory

program with heavy emphasis on mathematics, the sciences and Spanish. Second, a three-year technical program in either industry, agriculture or commerce which prepares students for entry to the Technical Institute, a university, special institutes, or for work. Third, a two-year art program in either music, theater, dance and ballet, or plastic arts. Students from this track, too, may pursue higher education in the fine arts.

Higher Education: Post-secondary education started with the founding of the University of Costa Rica in 1941. Currently there are four public and one private universities in the country. In 1981, the University of Costa Rica enrolled 48,925 students in its five campuses throughout the country. National University enrolled 10,632 in its three different campuses. The Technical Institute of Costa Rica had 2,229 students in its three branches. The State University at Distance had about 7,000 students. And the private Autonomous University of Central America had about 4,000 students. Furthermore, there are two other post-secondary institutions of higher learning which offer 2-3 year career and vocational courses to working adults. An estimated 6,000 students are enrolled in non-university post-secondary institutions. Altogether about 66,000 students are enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions. At the higher education level, there is much duplication, triplication and even quadruplication of programs and services leading to high costs and waste.

Although alleviating some socioeconomic and political pressure, the rapid expansion of higher education during the seventies has out-paced societal needs and/or the capacity of the labor force to absorb or utilize the products of higher education. Many people are overeducated but undertrained for what they are doing. Unemployment and under-employment for the well-educated are rising rapidly. On the other hand, there is a critical lack of trained personnel in areas like adult education or medium level technicians. The overwhelmingly academic orientation of secondary education does not help this situation either.

The Constitution guarantees university funding, autonomy, academic freedom, and self-governance. The current crisis has intensified the university-government relationship, but nothing much can be done. The uncontrolled expansion of higher education has created serious problems. Although there are admission exams for the universities, there is in fact open admission. And in the four public universities, about 60% of the students go for free, 90% receive some financial aid, and 10% pay some tuition (currently $40-$80 per term).

There is definite stratification in post-secondary education ranging from the University of Costa Rica at the top and the State University at a Distance at the bottom; followed by community colleges and other specialized institutes. There is also stratification within the universities. Most women and the poor go to the social sciences, applied sciences and public health, while men choose medicine and the hard sciences. The system needs coordination, planning, efficiency, excellence, rationalization, counseling of students, retention, more money and leadership.[6]

Access: Theoretically and in principle, all Costa Ricans regardless of gender, ethnicity, class and/or region have equal access to all levels of education. Input indicators of quality and quantity would seem to support this claim of equitable universal access to educational establishments. However, gross disparities exist in terms of actual access and especially in educational output for various segments of the population. There are differences both in the quality and quantity of education received by different people in the country. At the primary school level, nearly all children in the country enjoy equal access. About 20% of the rural and 22% of urban population is enrolled in elementary education, although this access is not universal for Black children in Limon and rural children in the outlying regions of the country such as Nicoya. There are severe disparities at the secondary level. On the average, only one percent of the population of the 304 rural districts is enrolled in secondary schools, while about 16% of the population of the 105 urban districts is enrolled in secondary schools. Only 15% of the rural districts have any secondary schools, while 90% of the urban districts do.

About 4% of primary and 9% of secondary school students drop out. Other estimates put the dropout rate at 30%. An estimated 2% of school age population never enters school. About 27% of the entire population is classified as functionally illiterate. There is much more illiteracy in rural areas and among women. In 1978, 92% of the primary and 36% of the secondary school age population was attending school. Overall, about 26% of the entire population or 82% of the school age population (ages 6-17) was attending school. About 60% of the labor force has completed primary, 23% secondary, and 8% some post-secondary education. The average years of school completed by the population 12 years and older is about six years.[7] In summary, in quantitative terms, there is a wide variety in educational attainment in the country.

Quality: Since there is very little educational research done in Costa Rica and since there is no tradition of gathering and keeping data on educational matters, it is difficult to speak with precision about the qualitative differences in education received by different groups. However, by looking at educational input factors, a variety of indirect indices, as well as the outcome of education, we are able to conclude that there are disparities in the quality of education at all levels of schooling.

All primary schools offer the full six years of elementary education. For the country as a whole, there is an average of 6.8 teachers per primary school. For rural districts the mean is 4.8, while for the urban districts it is 12.6. Two regions have a mean of 2.2 teachers per school and two have a mean of 3.2. This means that in rural areas there are many schools with multigrade classrooms where the teacher must teach two or even three different grade levels in the same classroom. This cannot but affect the children's education adversely.

Another factor that may contribute to disparities in the quality of education is professional supervision and support provided for teachers. Primary schools in urban areas have three times as many administrators as rural schools. Most rural schools do not have resident administrators. There are large district, regional and provincial disparities in this regard. Puntarenas and Guanacaste are the least favored and Alajuela and Cartago the most favored. This is the case for secondary schools, too. There are 3.5 administrators per school in rural areas, but 5.5 in urban areas.

Class size and student-teacher ratio is another factor to consider in educational quality. In primary schools, the national average is 31.6 students per teacher with a range of 20-40. At the secondary level rural schools have, due to scattered population, advantage over urban schools. The averages are 13 students per teacher for rural and 21 students for urban areas. Although the author did not see any classes, primary or secondary, with fewer than 35 students.

If one accepts the assumption that larger schools can provide better educational services, then here too, rural schools students receive inferior education. Urban elementary and secondary schools average about 700 students, twice or even quadruple the size of rural schools.

There are also inequities in the availability of auxiliary service people such as counselors, nurses, special education teachers, resources, libraries and facilities for extracurricular activities. Again, wealthy and urban schools do better in all of these respects. Rhetorical concern for quality, excellence and equity has not yet been translated into effective action.

Private Education: There are major differences between private and public education at all levels of education. Private schools developed in response to the weaknesses of public education and it is a powerful vehicle for maintaining social stratification in the society. In fact, some critics observe that private education fomented and has intensified, legitimized, solidified and obscured the class structure in Costa Rica. Private educational institutions clearly outperform public institutions. This, of course, leads to the further neglect and deterioration of public schools. Education has become a polarizing rather than unifying force in the country. Private education takes off the pressure from the government, but it has not influenced public education. It is said that private education capitalizes on and serves the class privileges, life style, self-centeredness and aspirations of the elite or semi-elite. Private schools are costly, selective, demanding and exclusive and thus available to the rich and well-educated only. Private high school graduates enter the most sought-after fields in the country or go abroad for further study. Interestingly enough, the most prestigeous high school is the Lincoln School. They have much going for them. The government provides the plant and the teachers, while tuition and contributions cover operating costs. Private education plays an important role at the secondary and higher education level.[8]

Finance and Costs: About one-third of the government's budget and 6% of the Gross National Product is spent on education. The country ranks 63rd in the world and first in non-socialist Latin America in terms of expenditure on education. Since 1970, about 23% of the central government budget has gone to elementary and secondary, while 10% to post-secondary education. Within the Ministry of Education itself, the budget allocation is 37% for elementary, 87% for secondary and 30% for higher education.

Expenditure on education has been increasing about 11% per year. This simply cannot continue. Cost-effectiveness and curtailment of education budget are imperative. But this in turn is made difficult by the low knowledge of cost-effectiveness in the system, the nature of educational finance in Costa Rica and the structure of costs in the system. Although private financial returns to education are clearly high, education in Costa Rica is provided almost entirely by the public treasury. Small steps have been taken to shift some of these costs to the individual recipients. Costs per unit are extremely high and need reduction.[9]

Costs: There are direct and indirect costs to attending school which make it difficult or impossible for some to obtain the necessary or adequate education. Textbooks and other school supplies cost the student money. Transportation costs money. In some schools, students must buy their own food. All primary and secondary school students must wear uniforms which can range from $25 to $65. At the university level, about 10% of the students pay some tuition. Private education at all levels costs much money. University students must also pay their living cists. Furthermore, in the rural areas, many boys, instead of getting education, must do farm work to support their families or maintain the family minifundio. In a country where the majority are poor, these factors have enormous impact on access, attainment and outcomes in education.[10]

Curriculum: At the pre-school level the schools focus on the socialization and babysitting aspects rather than cognitive development in the children. In primary school there are core subjects such as Spanish, social studies, general science, math and agriculture and there are special subjects such as music, P.E., religion, family living, industrial arts and plastic arts. The curriculum is loaded with fragmented subjects. The curriculum of the 3rd cycle (grades 7-9) is similar to that of primary school with the exception of replacing a special subject with either English or French. By the end of 9th grade, students decide which of the academic, technical, or artistic tracks to pursue in cycle 4 (grades 10-12). Required subjects at this level include Spanish, social studies, math, physics, biology, psychology, philosophy and a foreign language. The optional subjects are advanced levels of Spanish, social studies, math and science as well as a choice of arts, religion, practical art or physical education. University

people complain about the poor preparation of high school graduates. The curriculum appears sound and solid on paper, but there are serious problems in implementation. Post-secondary educational institutions are very similar to those in the United States.

Catholicism is the official state religion and is, therefore, taught in all schools. However, if parents do not wish their children to attend the 80-minute per week religious instruction, they may choose so. Some form of sex education is offered at all grade levels, so is health education, which includes alcohol abuse.

Special Education: There was no formal special education for the handicapped or the gifted prior to 1940. But specialized training for special education teachers started in 1974. The first Masters degrees in special education were offered in 1983. SE is in its infancy. There are few facilities, few trained personnel, no laws, procedures or tests, and there is inadequate funding. While there are an estimated 200,000 students who need special education. Another 63,000 adults need work rehabilitation. A 1954 polio outbreak struck about 50,000 people, many of whom have serious problems and reproduce handicapped children. Small steps are taken to tackle this major national problem.

Teacher Training: Teachers, administrators and other support personnel are trained in each of the four public universities, while the Technical Institute trains teachers for the technical schools and subjects. There are at least two major problems in teacher training programs. First, the training is abstract, theoretical, and university-based. There is inadequate professional component to the training and there is little supervised student teaching. Second, teacher educators include very few Ph.D.s and are often themselves very poor leaders. For example, of the 120 education faculty at the University of Costa Rica, only 5 have Ph.D.s. Most others hold bachelor and a few masters degree. A 1977 study found out that 66.1% of technical-vocational, 66.4% of special, 42% of pre-school, 18.1% of secondary and 23.9% of primary school teachers failed to meet the necessary certification standards. The percentages were much higher in the rural areas.[11]

Classroom performance of school teachers, in particular in the rural areas is a major concern of the MOE. This is due to the low income and prestige of the teaching career, poor pre-service training, lack of in-service training for most teachers, lack of adequate support services for teachers, lack of supervision and guidance by school administrators, and lack of an explicit cohesive policy of teacher training in the country.

Although primary and secondary school teachers undergo a similar five year training, there is gross disparity in their wages, thus driving many good primary teachers out of teaching grade school. Many educators and critics have stressed the key role school teachers play in education and they urge professionalization and professionalism of all teachers. About 90% of the grade school teachers and 45% of secondary school teachers are women. This poses serious problems.

Instructional staff at all levels of education is poorly paid. School teachers start with a monthly salary of about $120. The maximum salary for school teachers is $300 per month. At the university level, monthly salaries are: Full professor - $630; Associate professor - $511; Assistant professor - $400 and Lecturer - $350. The chancellor of the university is paid about $930 per month. All instructors are civil servants and therefore receive health care through the national social security system. But the poor monetary compensation does not provide for adequate incentives to teach or teach well at any level.[13] In response to all this, educators have formed the most powerful union in the country and they can cripple the school system. This they have done. Teachers are extremely well organized and have independent access to power. To the extent that even the Minister of Education is limited in what he can or cannot do.[14]

U.S. Influence: Contemporary Costa Rican education is heavily influenced and dominated by the U.S. educational system. It is estimated that about 800 Costa Ricans study in the U.S. at any given time. Every year about ten full Fulbright scholarships are awarded for graduate study in the U.S. Also, several post-doctoral fellowships are granted annually. Many scholarly exchanges take place between the two countries. The Costa Rican-American Cultural Center in San Jose offers a variety of services to the local population such as language instruction, library material, and direct access to major U.S. libraries. Through the Caribbean Basin Initiative, Costa Rica is to receive Two million dollars for sending university juniors and seniors to study at U.S. colleges and universities.

The United States Information Agency works closely with the departments of history and geography, political science and international affairs of the University of Costa Rica. Many important and influential Costa Ricans have received some form of training in the U.S. It is said that the country's current president, Alberto Monge, was trained by the American Institute for Free Labor, an arm of the AFL-CIO (which works closely with the CIA). All of his so-called economic cabinet was trained in the U.S.[15] In the school of education at the University of Costa Rica, the five people with Ph.D.s were all trained in the U.S. Robert Mead, head of the USIA, stated that the university community is the focal point of his endeavors because, according to him, it is the middle class, it is the center of whatever happens in the country, and it is the seat of future leaders. As for sending Costa Ricans to study in the U.S., Mr. Mead stated that "these people are the cream of the crop and they tend to reproduce themselves here." He said that his goal was "to develop an indigenous faculty favorable to the U.S.," and that "it is healthy for Costa Rican universities to work closely with U.S. universities." He added that "We have a specific clientele in mind and are aiming for that, not everyone." Mr. Mead stressed the fact that "Costa Rica is in bed with the U.S. so we must develop people who understand, appreciate and defend the U.S."[16]

Mr. Mead admitted that USIA had clear and definite foreign policy objectives which included the development of Costa Rican university faculty, who "would understand the U.S., be friendly and sympathetic to it, and convey this sense to their students." USIA is completing an agreement with the University of Costa Rica to establish an area study program on U.S. studies at the University. Mr. Mead added that U.S. educational assistance is in areas "that we'd be interested in." He revealed that the $2 million educational assistance portion of the CBI is "more political than educational." The Americans in Costa Rica and U.S.-trained Costa Ricans such as Dr. Sherman Thomas, president of the Partners of the Americas, are alarmed by the 1,000 or so Costa Ricans who study in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and they all feel that this must be countered by training Costa Ricans in the U.S. Many American academic institutions ranging from Harvard to Iowa State University are contributing to this endeavor.

Partners of the Americas, established in 1964, is another major influence on the education of many Costa Ricans. The program includes the exchange of thirty

high school students from each country every year. It also includes sending teachers and professionals to the U.S. Since Partners of the Americas' participants must know English, have some connections and pay their own transportation, the venture can reach the elite only. In fact, the former but living president, Jose' Figueres was one of the beneficiaries of this program. The program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development with help from the American Express, IBM, the Coca Cola Company, and the Mott Foundation.

The United States Agency for International Development has been influential in Costa Rican education since 1950 when it was called Point IV. Since 1950, AID has granted Costa Rica about 2242 scholarships in a variety of fields at different degree levels. The emphasis has been on training in the U.S. Costa Ricans for high level functions in education, government, business, and labor. AID has also trained Costa Ricans for technical and agricultural work. And AID has provided extensive technical assistance in the establishment of training institutions. AID produced about 1½ million textbooks for the country. And AID sponsored numerous North American scholars and advisors for their work in Costa Rica. And finally, as part of its outreach efforts, AID has, since 1978, been sponsoring through its Special Development Fund, small projects throughout the country. AID is also helping the Central American Council on Higher Education through the National Science Foundation.[17]

Many other U.S. organizations such as the Ford, Rockefeller, and the Pan American Development Foundations, the American Institute for Free Labor, CARE, the Four-H Council, the League of Women Voters and several religious organizations have at some time contributed to influence education in Costa Rica.[18]

The World Bank, heavily influenced by the U.S., has been providing financial, technical and institutional assistance since 1973 to Costa Rica. The World Bank's focus is on what it calls "the human capital formation" and "institution building."[19] Costa Rica is in the grip of U.S. cultural imperialism.

Problems: In comparison to other third world and/or Latin American countries, Costa Rica has indeed accomplished much in education. However, once one studies its educational system and its relationship to the socioeconomic, political and cultural setting, there are some serious problems demanding action. Some of these problems have been referred to earlier, others follow:

First, although at the conceptual level there is good curricular foundation from pre-school through high school, it suffers from rigid uniformity. Major curricular reforms, including diversification, localization, integration and flexibility are needed. Currently education fails to produce the necessary mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes required by society and the labor force. It is out of touch with local realities and the demands of contemporary societal needs. If education is to play a role in Costa Rican national development, its development must be conceptualized and implemented on a sector-wide systemic basis, its organization must be made more efficient and effective through decentralization and its content must be made consonant with local realities.

Second, textbooks constitute a major problem at all levels of the educational system. All students must purchase their own books. On the other hand, since many of the books are produced outside the country and since the government is almost bankrupt now, textbooks are expensive and often very old. A Spanish firm is producing grade school books in Spain. There is much corruption in this enterprise. This means that many students go without having textbooks or must share books, although zeroxing copyrighted marerial is a very lucrative venture in the country. Lack of textbooks has serious implications for teaching and learning.

Third, support services such as supervision, guidance, testing and measurement, special education services and technical support are extremely weak. This weakness is due to lack of funds, lack of trained personnel and the quality of administrators. The majority of schools do not have adequate resources and materials such as gyms, textbooks, libraries, labs, audiovisual equipment, home economic or vocational workshops, etc. About 90% of the funds are spent on salaries. This leads to theoretical and rote learning at best.

Fourth, the management of education is heavily politicized. Under Costa Rican law the country's presidents change every four years. Consequently, all the high and even medium level officials and bureaucrats change every four years. Besides, many of these appointments are political and not based on expertise. This makes it impossible to plan, execute and evaluate things within a span of four years. Furthermore, there is little, if any, continuity from one administration to another. Even on a daily basis, members of the executive or parliament meddle in even

professional educational matters. Schools are established, appointments made, programs decided, without the knowledge of the people directly responsible.

Fifth, a major problem is the centralization of all power, resources, information and decision-making in the Ministry of Education and the consequent crippling of local initiative. There is need for the decentralization of educational management whereby the MOE functions as a policy-making, leading and coordinating mechanism while the regions and districts conduct education on day-to-day basis. Better coordination of the formal and informal sectors of education is needed.

Sixth, as it is, there is inadequate coordination and linkage between various educational institutions, between the levels of education or between formal and non-formal education.

Seventh, debate over the goals, philosophy, curriculum, teaching methods and evaluation of outcomes continue. Educators like Humberto Perez[20] argue for the continued reassessment and a renewal of the Fundamental Education Law of 1957. Critics point to the enormous discrepencies between educational ideals and reality. For example, the ideal of fostering the full development of the individual and the rote, mechanical, narrow and superficial nature of education; the contradiction between the goal of opening up minds and the reality of blind patriotism; between democratizing education and the fact that 65% of the population over 25 years of age has gone beyond seventh grade. These observers charge that education is simply operating in a vacuum and really does not prepare the vast majority for a harmonious, full, noble, compassionate, responsible, effective, communal, critical, democratic and dignified living.

Eighth, with such large investment and so much accomplishment in education, it is remarkable how little is known either about education itself or its relationship to society at large. Very little is known about the quality or quantity of education. Although the Ministry of Education has been collecting data on major aspects of education, all data were, until 1979, tabulated by hand, thus prone to error. Data are limited and late in availability. Existing information is incomplete, unsystematic, and very unreliable. There is lack of both short and long term information. The MOE does not have qualified staff and the universities do not have the tradition to conduct research. Neither have these bodies utilized the data gathered by other governmental agencies.

There is very little research, scholarship, or professional activity concerning education. The first research department of the MOE was established in February, 1983. The Multinational Center for Educational Research was founded just recently. There is not one regular scholarly journal in education. The first convention for educators at the university level took place in August, 1983. The first research institute at the University of Costa Rica was established in 1980.[21] Of the entire sociology and anthropology faculty at this university, only five are doing research. The only journals and literature on education are American, and language and financial cuts make their circulation very limited. The research that does take place is mostly esoteric and not problem-oriented. On top of all this, since most university professors moonlight to make a decent living they have no time, energy or interest to do research. There are no incentives for scholarship.

Ninth, there is lack of coordination and planning between the educational system and national economic needs and reality. There is need for coordination on the one hand, between the various forms and levels of education; and on the other hand, education needs to be harmonized at least in small measure, with the needs, interests and aspirations of the country.

Tenth, there is declining cost-effectiveness in education as evidenced by increased costs per unit and decrease in quality. Work needs to be done on efficiency as well as quality.

Many educators, academics, government officials, social commentators and lay citizens in Costa Rica are aware of these and other problems, and there are some who are working hard and long to deal with these issues and problems. But these isolated efforts are impeded by: the severe economic crisis, preoccupation with national unity, security and sovereignty, extreme centralization, red tape, political interference in education, lack of sufficient expertise, lack of data, lack of leadership, the cycle of four year political-administrative change, mass mediocrity amongst the rank-and-file educators, lack of sense of urgency, and heavy political-economic-ideological and intellectual dependence on outside - namely the United States. Time will tell.[22]

NOTES

1. Jorge Hidalgo. Several interviews during summer, 1983.

2. The World Bank. Costa Rica: Education Sector Memorandum. Report No. 2853-CR, February 7, 1980.

3. Ministereo DE Educacion Publica. Pamphlet, San Jose, Costa Rica. No date.

4. Joaquin B. Calvo. Several interviews during summer, 1983.

5. Joaquin B. Calvo. Education in Costa Rica. Unpublished monograph. San Jose, CR., 1983.

6. Jose' Andres Masis. Interview, April, 1983.

7. The World Bank. Ibid.

8. Rolando Berty. Several interviews, summer, 1983.

9. The World Bank. Ibid.

10. George P. Menegay. Costa Rica, Mult-Year Plan. December 7, 1982.

11. The World Bank. Ibid.

12. Patricia Ratana. Several interviews, summer, 1983.

13. Jorge Hidalgo. Interview, summer, 1983.

14. The Tico Times. April, 1983 issues.

15. Newsweek. July 11, 1983.

16. Robert Mead. Two interviews spring-summer, 1983.

17. U. S. Agency for International Development, Mission to Costa Rica. The U.S. Government Economic Assistance Program in Costa Rica: 1942-1983

18. American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, Inc. Development Assistance Programs of U.S. Non-Profit Organizations, Costa Rica, June, 1978.

19. The World Bank. Ibid.

20. Humberto Perez. Educacion Y Desarrolo. Editorial Costa Rica, San Jose, 1981.

21. Humberto Perez. Interview, summer, 1983.

22. Additionally, this paper is a product of about five months of observations, travel, general reading, many formal and informal interviews with many Costa Ricans, and the cumulative input of the Lewis and Clark College overseas study group in Costa Rica during Spring and Summer of 1983. I acknowledge and appreciate the generous and excellent input of all of these people, but take responsibility for the final product.